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ABSTRACT

Many expatriate managers in multinational corporations have failed due to cultural ignorance. This failure has caused concern and heightened interest in training expatriate managers for cross-cultural appreciation and communication skills. The most commonly cited reasons for failure are the manager's and spouse's inability to adjust to cultural differences. A variety of resources for cross-cultural information are available. Components recommended for cross-cultural training include native and target culture communication skills development, culture-specific information, and general cultural awareness training. The design of existing training programs varies greatly. A study shows that U.S. firms and universities lag far behind their foreign counterparts in employee cross-cultural training, while other research shows that such training is effective in promoting business success. A five-phase cross-cultural communication training module has been designed to provide sensitization to the participant's own concept of culture and to promote appreciation of cultural diversity. The five phases include: (1) dyadic discussions of "outsider" experiences; (2) probing of participant membership in subcultures and subgroups; (3) small group discussion of the role of shared characteristics among culturally diverse individuals in appreciating differences; (4) cross-cultural simulation; and (5) debriefing and discussion. (MSE)

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CROSS-CULTURAL COMMUNICATION TRAINING IN BUSINESS: A SENSITIZING MODULE

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With many American corporations pinning their hopes for growth on expanding their international markets, sometimes in partnership with foreign firms, more U.S. nationals are being assigned to work in foreign countries than ever before (Lee, 1983) and, unfortunately, many of these American expatriates are failing. One study (Tung, 1981), in fact, found that fully 30% of American expatriate managers were failing in their assignments and that the single most salient reason for these costly failures was the lack of cross cultural understanding. Harvey (1983) concluded that each such failure averaged $100,000 and Copeland (1984) projected the total cost of such failures to American corporations in the billions of dollars each year. In response to this troubling phenomenon, a number of American multi-national corporations have acknowledged the need to train their employees in the development of cross cultural appreciation and communication skills if they are to successfully compete in the international market place. This paper briefly reviews the growing concern for and interest in this problem among U.S. firms, provides a sampling of available cross cultural information and training and offers a beginning sensitizing training module suitable as a general introduction to the concept of culture prior to immersing American business persons and their families in the specific culture in which they will be working and living on assignment from their firms.

Concerns

Authors of many recent articles published in business related professional journals have warned of the perils of and reported the consequences of attempting to do business in foreign markets without providing appropriate cross cultural communication training to affected employees. Adler (1983), for example, found that a hefty 16.4 percent of some 11,219 articles published in twenty-four management journals between 1971 and 1980 addressed cross-cultural management and other cross-cultural issues. Given the widespread attention devoted to the topic in industry publications over the past two decades, it would seem to follow that virtually all U.S. multi-national corporations would be anxiously engaged in providing cross cultural training for their employees scheduled to be deployed overseas. Surprisingly, however, only 8.5 percent of U.S. multi-national corporations provide cross-cultural training, according to Lee.

As noted above, the cost to American business due to cultural ignorance is enormous. To compound the problem, Lee has contended, for example, that U.S. corporations are at an even greater disadvantage vis-a-vis non-U.S. companies and governments in the global marketplace due to an apparent resurgence of national pride among our offshore competitors. Lee contends that when an American working in a foreign country commits a cultural offense, as they are almost

certain to do, many local nationals are slow to forgive, if they forgive at all, as a result of their newly felt and newly practiced patriotic nationalism. This is an additional factor, then, which, when added to a variety of other factors, has contributed to the necessity of American companies being forced to recall or even dismiss anywhere from 10-40 percent of their expatriates as unable to adapt to the foreign posting. Research suggests that neglecting cross cultural training is more often than not the culprit. By way of comparison, culturally aware Japanese companies, with their highly developed and comprehensive training programs complete with emphasis on host country language proficiency, experience an overall failure rate of only 10 percent (Murray & Murray, 1986). Further, when the apparent growing popularity of joint ventures between U.S. and foreign firms is factored into this cross cultural business equation, it becomes abundantly clear that American success in these ventures will depend greatly upon the ability of American workers to readily adapt to the dynamics of living and working in a culture often overwhelmingly different from their own (Copeland, 1985). Therefore, aside from the costs accrued from training and posting expenses, American corporations stand to lose additional billions if they are unable to successfully join with offshore firms in co-ventures due, at least in part, to their dearth of cross culturally trained employees.

Personnel Decisions

Other cross cultural research addresses the question of how American companies make personnel decisions on foreign postings. Such literature suggests that past performance and technical skills are the top two decision making criteria most often employed by American corporations in selecting employees for overseas assignment, yet these criteria are not listed among the top five reasons identified as contributing to the failure of American business persons overseas (Hixon, 1986). Rather, the two most often cited reasons for expatriate failure are a manager's inability to adjust to cultural differences and spouse inability to adjust to the new culture. Most cross cultural training researchers and advocates strongly urge that the cultural dimension be carefully considered in all personnel decisions relating to foreign postings. In addition, Harvey (1985), after examining the failure rate of American expatriates specifically in relation to family considerations, recommended that spouses and other family members participate in cross cultural training along with the employee.

Available Cross Cultural Training

The most readily available cross cultural information is found in articles and books designed to provide the

reader with cultural basics. Two books in this category, for example, are European Customs and Manners by Braganti and Devine (1984) and Do's and Taboos Around the World by Axtell (1986). Recent articles on this subject include Snowdon (1986), White (1986), Streltfeld (1986), Spruell (1985), Copeland (1984), and Hawkins (1983). Typically such authors provide enough information for the reader to realize that there are significant cultural differences that need to be considered when doing business outside the United States, but they hasten to add that a "one shot" introduction to the concept is not sufficient to secure success and sources are referenced where additional information can be obtained.

Other writers advocate specific components which they argue should be included in cross cultural training programs. For example, Stull, (1983), proposes a program which includes a strong emphasis on communication skills development as well as information on a specific culture. Similarly, Copeland (1986) instructs on program development and argues for culture specific training rather than a wide spectrum program. Muniz and Chasnoff (1983) provide a design wherein a cultural awareness hierarchy of six levels, beginning with knowledge of self and ending with understanding of another culture, is proposed. Wigglesworth (1983) stresses the need for perceptual training while Ivey (1980) concludes that success in cross cultural relationships depends on training in the communication skills of the trainee's own culture. In Aranda's (1986)

survey of 103 businesses engaged in world trade, it was determined that the majority of surveyed firms were more willing to support a skills based cross cultural training program rather than one which was predominantly theory based. Apparently perceiving this preference, Harvey (1983) proposed a cross-cultural training cooperative that was skill based and included short term, intermediate term and long term objectives. Mendenhall and Oddou (1986) developed a taxonomy of expatriate acculturation profiles in an effort to identify the specific needs of the personality type so that, if needed, remedial measures could be designed and undertaken. Though there has been considerable debate over the culture/general approach versus the culture/specific approach (Brislin & Pedersen, 1976; Gudykunst & Hammer, 1983; and Jones, 1979, for example), sometimes also called the etic versus the emic standpoint (Pike, 1966), little empirical data exists to establish one approach as superior to the other (Broome, 1986).

Other helpful articles describe extant training programs and resources. For example, Cushing (1981) cites the Society for Intercultural Education, Training and Research (SIETAR) as the largest cross cultural training organization and reports that SIETAR provides conference packages, a certification program for trainers, a data bank of cultural information and available trainers as well as a journal for its 1,500 members. Also cited is the International division of the American Society for Training

and Development (ASTD) which acts as a clearing house for information on international training issues, publishes a newsletter devoted to international training and also makes referrals to qualified training personnel. Two other groups noted by Cushing are the International Society for Organization and Development at George Washington University and the International Consultants Foundation which are both active in providing training programs and consultation. If rental or purchase of video tapes is appealing to corporate trainers, "Going International" by Copeland Griggs Productions is noted as representative of a number of helpful supplements to in-house programs. These programs generally include units on cultural anthropology, exploring specific business problems which may arise, problems with moving a family overseas and the problems of reentering American life after the offshore assignment is completed. In addition to these and other institution and private for profit programs, there are, of course, many hundreds of individual academics and other consultants who provide their own training programs in accordance with the needs and preferences of their clients.

Other Nation Preparation of Business Expatriates

Tung (1982) surveyed 300 American firms listed in the Directory of American Firms Operating Abroad as well as 246 Western European multi-nationals and 110 Japanese

multi-nationals listed in the Directory of the 500 Largest Industrial Companies Abroad to ascertain training provided to expatriates of such corporations. It was discovered that Western Europe trains 68% of its personnel, Japan trains 57% and the United States trains 32% of its expatriates in cross cultural issues. Though Tung found a higher incidence of American firms sponsoring cross cultural training for their employees than did Lee (1983), as reported earlier, the fact remains that U.S. firms still lag far behind their offshore competitors in providing such training to their employees. The Western European training most usually involved language training, information on the history, geography, climate, housing and schools as well as a cultural orientation to the host country. The Japanese programs were similar in that they commonly included language training, cultural orientation and provided information on the history, geography, climate, housing and schools of the host nation. In addition, it is interesting to note that the Japanese provided a program that employed simulated intercultural encounters and sensitivity training. Tung concluded that the more rigorous the cross cultural training, the lower incidence of failure realized.

Closer to home, Bogorya (1985) noted that Canadian universities, like the Japanese programs, rely on a series of cultural simulations with heavy emphasis on cross cultural communication skills development for students enrolled in international business programs. Other

successful programs include business schools in the United Kingdom and other Western European countries which work closely with multi-national corporations to provide research and training for specific firms' cross cultural training needs (Eales, 1985). By comparison, a startling finding that only 39 percent of American business schools offer courses in international business is disturbing (Copeland, 1984) especially when it follows that an even smaller percentage of American business schools would offer courses in cross cultural sensitization, understanding and intercultural communication skills development for their students. Here, unfortunately, is an instance of industry and academe being in lock-step to the detriment of American business.

Success Through Training

More research is needed to gauge the success of those U.S. firms which have chosen to invest in cross cultural training for their employees. However, Kodak, DuPont and Procter and Gamble may be representative of enlightened American multi-nationals which have committed significant resources to recent cross cultural training for their Japan bound employees. Interestingly, all three firms have realized recent profit enhancements in their overseas operations and have attributed at least some of the increase

to the cross cultural training afforded their workers (Berger, 1987).

An earlier study conducted by the London Business School and French INSEAD school is in harmony with the recent American experience reported above in that it was found that graduates who had been in the multi-national field for more than three years and who had taken cross cultural training were more successful than their peers who had not participated in such training (Ratiu, 1983). In addition, Mogi (1985) concluded that Japanese investment in cross cultural training for their expatriates was one of the reasons for the success of so many of their multi-national corporations.

It is clear that the American business establishment is generally aware of the increased potential for failure abroad should they fail to cross culturally train their employees. However, despite the availability of many programs, it appears that American multi-national corporations taking advantage of them are still, surprisingly and puzzlingly, in the minority. That more corporations are not taking the lead in training their expatriates cross culturally is difficult to fathom given the substantial published research establishing the apparent fact that companies which provide cross cultural training have less expatriate failure and may even be more financially successful in their offshore operations.

A Sensitizing Module

Wondering if some companies and interested individuals are simply overwhelmed by the prospect of commencing such training, we offer here to trainers, academics and other consultants a rather simple five phase cross cultural communication training module. This approach is purposely broad based or etic in nature in an effort to alert participants to their own concept of culture and to engender awareness of and appreciation for cultural diversity. The principles and activities suggested here have been successfully offered in college and university intercultural communication, speech and multi-cultural education courses, among others, as well as in a variety of consulting style programs designed to prepare students and workers to better appreciate the cultural aspect in human relations preparatory to host country specific cultural immersion. The suggested phases, depending on corporation needs and preferences, may be offered in an intensified one day encounter or spread out over several presentations. Once the module is completed, then cross cultural training focused on specific host countries can be provided to employees and their families assigned to those locales. Such culture specific training should then be that much more meaningful and useful to the newly culturally aware business student, corporate employee or family member.

Phase 1- The training module commences with the facilitator introducing the concepts of culture, subculture, and subgroup (Samovar, Porter & Jain, 1981) and leading a discussion of their implications in international business and/or other contexts. Module participants are then assigned to dyads and asked to exchange information relative to actual situations they may have experienced which caused them to feel like "outsiders" due, perhaps, to their language abilities or accent, religion, lifestyles, race, ethnic backgrounds, political philosophies, athletic abilities, gender, educational levels, appearance or clothing, birthplace, age, and the like. Dyadic partners should keep notes of this interaction so that overt signs contributing to the "outsider" experience during the recounted situations like artifacts, nonverbal behaviors, communication styles and so forth are identified. (Suggested time: one hour)

Phase 2- This phase provides for a probing of participant memberships in so called subcultures and subgroups. To heighten participant awareness in this regard as well as to aid participants in developing an understanding of the possibly unique interpersonal dynamics operating between culturally diverse peoples, the following activity is recommended: Participants are asked to create a twenty to thirty item self-profile inventory which might include such self-descriptors as age, gender, religion, ethnic group, race, national heritage, occupation or

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occupational goal, job title, marital status, political persuasion, educational level, and other telling adjectives. Participants are then assigned to dyads a second time, but this time according to at least three obviously diverse characteristics revealed by the self inventory such as age, gender and race, for example. Dyad partners are then instructed to interview each other to discover issues upon which they have substantial disagreement or dichotomous orientations such as religion, separation of church and state, political persuasion or candidates, opinions on abortion, the need for a nuclear deterrent or nuclear power plants, other environmental issues, etc. These topics of controversy or disagreement are recorded by the participants for use in Phase 3. (Suggested time: one to one-and-a half hours)

Phase 3- Moving from the two-person or dyadic interpersonal communication context to small group interaction, this phase utilizes the content (topics of disagreement) from phase 2 in an effort to develop an appreciation in participants for the inherent, though not insurmountable, barriers associated with communicating across differences or even cultures. Dyads from phase 2 are combined to form groups of from four to eight members. Each small group or team is then asked to discuss how common or shared characteristics among culturally diverse persons might be emphasized in gaining an understanding of and, eventually, an appreciation and respect for differences.

Common characteristics which might be focused on could include similarities in work experiences, age, gender, ethnicity, hobbies, religion, leisure reading preferences, marital status and family experiences or shared values and outlooks on life, for example. The facilitator focuses the activity on the implications of societal perception of individuals or groups who may be from distinctly different cultural backgrounds than the dominant white and middle class American culture (Samovar and Porter, 1982). The end result of this activity could be a team generated short story, guest editorial or letter to the editor for submission to a corporate newsletter or perhaps even a campus, community or trade publication. Ideally, the piece should be written with the intent to foster greater understanding and acceptance of cultural diversity. Involvement in the writing process has the added benefits of helping participants verbalize their feelings and couch their beliefs in persuasive form thus strengthening their own, perhaps new found, beliefs. (Suggested time: One to two hours)

Phase 4 - This phase is devoted to a cross-cultural simulation as suggested by the successful Japanese and Canadian programs noted above. Our experience has taught us the value of simulations like Cultural Contact (Glazier, 1976), or BaFa BaFa (Shirts), for instance, in teaching cultural diversity experientially. These kinds of simulations typically divide participants into two

significantly diverse "cultures." Each culture has its own set of distinctive customs, behaviors, taboos, history, political system, technology, economic system, language and so forth, which are not known, initially, to the other culture. One culture is usually more "developed" than the other and each culture is charged with a goal to accomplish requiring its members to interact quite closely with members of the other culture. As would be expected, there are many frustrating experiences along the interaction process trail as participants learn what it can be like to find themselves forced to interact with people from a radically different culture. Participants readily make the connection between the simulation and feelings and behaviors manifested by foreign visitors to our shores and to what their feelings may very well be like upon their arrival in the host nation. The resulting empathetic feelings are generally quite useful to participants in dealing with those from other cultures. Other cross cultural games and simulations are readily available. See, for example, Newmark and Asante's Intercultural Communication (1976) for other ideas. (Suggested time: one and one half to three hours)

Phase 5 - The final phase provides for a debriefing of the cross-cultural simulation and should ultimately focus on the concepts of culture, cultural diversity, cultural awareness, and cross cultural communication. In modules graced by personnel who have traveled or worked abroad, these participants should be encouraged to share previous

cross-cultural experiences with the group. Ideally, the cross-cultural communication training module will alow them to review those experiences with much greater insight. If the shared experience happened to be negative, perhaps their new understanding will allow them to suggest ways to avoid such an outcome in the future. If positive, the participant should be encouraged to analyze the experience and suggest possible reasons for the positive nature of the interaction. In other words, what was done right? It has been our experience that in virtually all cases, the suggested module will have begun to sensitize participants to the importance of own-culture awareness, other-culture awareness, understanding and appreciation as well as the need to develop communication skills such as listening, empathy and attendance to nonverbal signals, for example, required for productive cross-cultural interactions. If time permits, one or more cases from Samovar and Porter's Intercultural Communication: A Reader (1982) could be discussed to start preparing participants for consideration of specific cultures. (Suggested time: one to two hours)

We must re-emphasize that the suggested module is a general wide spectrum introduction to and beginning sensitizing experience in cross-cultural awareness and communication. Once trainers feel that participants are sufficiently culturally sensitized in the broad sense, arrangements may then be made to provide host country specific cross cultural training when employees actually

receive their overseas assignments. We can all but guarantee that participants culturally sensitized by the suggested module will gain much more from the more specific training in the particular cultures where the corporation has plans to base their employees.

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